

May 16, 2016-Supplemental Statement, submitted by L. Guidry, Psy.D.

As President of MATSA, I want to comment on three important issues unresolved by the commission:

Ensure Accountability. Professionals, legislators, and the general public are all adamant about stopping known offenders from ever abusing again. We know that a very small percent of adult sex offenders, and an even smaller percentage of adolescents, manifest the characteristics that we find most frightening and in need of the most intensive and comprehensive management/intervention. We must target our resources towards this small percentage; until then we will not create the highest level of safety possible. We cannot, however, afford to get this wrong. **The distinctions we are making about the risk to abuse must be as accurate as possible.**

Research-Based Best Practices. There is a growing trend across criminal justice, public health, child protection fields towards the use of “research-based practices.” The move in this direction has been successful because doing so will both save money and improve outcomes. Although many of the commissioners supported a premise that the research is not strong enough to consider changing current practice, MATSA respectfully disagrees. Although the research is not perfect, it clearly shows that for adults, using an actuarial risk assessment tool will more accurately reflect the risk to reoffend. The current practices used by the SORB have never been validated, and there is no assurance that it accurately or inaccurately levels sex offender. **MATSA continues to fully support the use of research-based best practices, as it has done for decades, in order to increase safety and reduce sexual offense recidivism.**

Separate the Children/Adolescents from Adults. In Massachusetts, we have the dubious distinction of being only one of several states that does not separate juveniles from adults in our sex offender statutes. This lack of differentiation has resulted in resources that are needed for the most dangerous adults being spent on children and youth who do not require that level of intervention. Research demonstrates that this lack of differentiation in our public policy not only decreases safety and positive outcomes and is fiscally inefficient, but also punishes our children and teens at a level that cuts off their ability to grow into healthy productive adults. Adolescents should be held accountable for their sexual abuse crimes, but they also must be given a chance to learn what it means to live productive lives. **Research shows that in almost all cases at this age with appropriate treatment a second chance will work.**

The Recidivism Commission was established as a measured response to the horrific Burbine case. In this instance, a sex offender identified as a level one by SORB sexually abused a number of infants and young children in his wife's daycare service. The legislature established this commission to recommend changes to ensure that this kind of crime would never happen again. I am truly saddened that the full commission could not come up with one recommendation that would correct the system that is making critical public safety and human rights decisions based substantially on chance.